

GAMING APPARATUS AND METHOD OF GAMING INCLUDING INTERACTIVE GAMING SYMBOLS FOR PRODUCING DIFFERENT OUTCOMES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates generally to gaming devices and methods. More specifically, the present invention relates to gaming methods, devices and systems wherein interactive gaming symbols are utilized to potentially alter the perceived outcome of a game.

[0003] 2. State of the Art

[0004] Electronic games and their methods and apparatus for use are well known in the art. Electronic games include games of chance, games of skill, and games involving both skill and chance. Examples of patents describing various games of chance include U.S. Pat. No. 5,833,536 to Davids et al. (Nov. 10, 1998), U.S. Pat. No. 5,769,716 to Saffari et al. (Jun. 23, 1998), U.S. Pat. No. 5,820,460 to Fulton (Oct. 13, 1998) and U.S. Pat. No. 5,947,820 to Morro et al. (Sep. 7, 1999).

[0005] **FIG. 1** is a block diagram of an exemplary electronic gaming device **100** as found in the art. An electronic gaming device **100** may conventionally include a microprocessor or other computer **104** having a central processing unit (CPU) **106** and memory **108**. The computer may be coupled to a number of peripheral devices such as, by example only, a display screen **110** (e.g., a cathode ray tube (CRT), plasma display, liquid crystal display (LCD), and/or a display based on light emitting diodes (LED)), possibly having a touchscreen input **112** (see U.S. Pat. No. 5,951,397 to Dickinson (Sept. 14, 1999)) for display of graphics associated with one or more games playable on gaming device **100**. Buttons, keys or other user input devices **114** are also operably coupled to CPU **106** for initiating game play and for other functions associated with play of a game. Preferably a coin, currency or card acceptor device **116** (to accept a credit card, gaming card, smart card and the like) permits a player to enable play of a game by placing one or more wagers. The electronic game may also include a separate scoreboard display **118** to indicate a player's success, or display the player's accumulated winnings. A coin and/or currency dispenser **120** may also be included, or a player's winnings credited back to him or her using the card acceptor **116**.

[0006] Electronic games may also be coupled to one or more other computers such as a central computer **130** of a casino, e.g. via a network card **122** and link **124**, modem **126** or the like. The game parameters **128**, such as how, when and where particular images will appear on the display screen **110**, how the game works and how to operate the various elements operably coupled to the computer **104**, are stored in the memory **108**. Often, the electronic game **100** may be housed in a structural and/or decorative housing **102** (shown in broken lines) as is well known and understood by those of ordinary skill in the art.

[0007] As noted above, initiating an electronic game can be done as simply as by inserting a coin, token, or other type of currency. Another more comprehensive example of initiating a game includes inserting an identification card, such

as a "smart card" having a programmed microchip or a magnetic strip coded with a player's identification, credit totals and other relevant information. See U.S. Pat. No. 5,265,874 to Dickinson et al. (Nov. 30, 1993). It is also known to use a writeable identification card, such as a smart card to eliminate the need for a network or direct connection between remote systems and a common controller or point database such as is described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,806,045 to Biorge et al. (Sep. 8, 1998). Promotional point and credit information may be retrieved, recorded and updated using a smart card. Additionally, it is known to transfer money to a game through an electronic funds transfer as described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,902,983 to Crevelt et al. (May 11, 1999).

[0008] In addition to the manner described above, it is also possible to participate in a game of chance via the Internet. This is typically accomplished through a casino or game host site offering displays similar to those found in conventional electronic games. Generally, to play a game of chance via the Internet, a software file is downloaded to a player's computer or terminal, which may then be used to install the necessary software for the game and/or access the casino or game host Internet site. However, such gaming may also be "streamed" across the Internet as with video and audio streaming techniques. As with a conventional electronic game, Internet electronic games may be accessed using an identification code or name to identify a specific player and retrieve that player's credit total or play history.

[0009] Existing electronic game displays typically include multiple images representing various aspects of a game such as a game portion, a credit total portion and a wager amount portion. Other electronic game displays include an additional bonus award portion to indicate an amount of a bonus award which may be won, typically through multiple or secondary games. See U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,851,148 to Brune et al. (Dec. 22, 1998) and 5,911,418 to Adams (Jun. 15, 1999).

[0010] Bonus gaming, also known in the art, includes employing a secondary game, often a different type of game than that of the primary game, as an additional activity for a player of the primary game. Implementation of a bonus game includes providing a game of chance, such as for example, one like that described above with reference to **FIG. 1**, as a first or a primary gaming unit. Another gaming unit is then provided as a secondary, bonus game which is typically accessible upon receipt of a winning hand (in the case of a card game) or the occurrence of a specified symbol, icon, or indicia or one or more specific combinations of the same during play of the primary gaming unit. Often the existence of a bonus game serves to attract a player through the perception of having increased opportunity to win during the player's gaming activities.

[0011] More recently, electronic games have begun to incorporate gaming symbols or indicia in primary games and/or secondary games which act as a wild card or interact with other gaming symbols in a limited sense. For example, Atronic Casino Technologies has introduced a game known as "Break the Spell" which includes a wizard symbol. The wizard symbol acts as a wild card whenever appearing on reel **2**, **3** or **4** of a 5 reel video slot machine. When the wizard appears on one of the specified reels, he comes off of his position on the reel and moves along the same reel to positions along the other paylines substituting for any symbol that would result in a win along the respective paylines.